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# CALIFORNIA BIRDS



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## CALIFORNIA BIRDS

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# CALIFORNIA BIRDS



Volume 2, Number 3, 1971

## NORTHERN AND LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSHES IN CALIFORNIA

Laurence C. Binford

### INTRODUCTION

No thorough summary of the California status of the Northern Waterthrush *Seiurus noveboracensis* and the Louisiana Waterthrush *S. motacilla* has been published since 1944 (Grinnell and Miller). Since then the status of the Louisiana Waterthrush has not changed, there still being only one record for the state.

For the Northern Waterthrush, on the other hand, the increase in number and sophistication of birders has produced many additional records, from which certain trends begin to emerge. One problem that renders these new data difficult to interpret is "observer bias." Field ornithologists tend to be selective in their birding habits in respect to localities and dates. As a result, large areas of the state remain virtually unworked, and other localities are visited only at certain times of the year. My remarks concerning the status of the Northern Waterthrush in California are therefore largely speculative.

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## NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH

The Northern Waterthrush breeds from north-central Alaska and the tree line in northern Canada south to central British Columbia and the northern tier of states from Idaho eastward. In winter it occurs primarily from southern Mexico, the Bahamas, and Bermuda south through Central America and the West Indies to northern South America. It winters in smaller numbers on both coasts of Mexico north to San Luis Potosi, Sinaloa (rare), Nayarit (common), and southern Baja California, and casually in southeastern United States (Alden, 1969; American Ornithologists' Union, 1957; Miller, et al., 1957). Although this species migrates principally through central and eastern United States and across the Gulf of Mexico, it is known to be a regular but rather uncommon transient through eastern Arizona (Phillips, et al., 1964).

I have compiled for the Northern Waterthrush a total of 124 California records (see Appendix), of which 81 are from coastal counties (fall 53, spring 10, winter 18, summer 0) and 43 from eastern counties (fall 17, spring 22, winter 2, summer 2). For the purposes of this paper, coastal counties include San Benito and all San Francisco Bay area counties. Eastern counties are Mono, Inyo, San Bernardino, Riverside, and Imperial. The species has been recorded in 16 counties (see fig. 1) and during every month except July. There is only one record outside the counties that border either the states to the east or the ocean (San Benito Co.) and only one for the northern third of the state (Mendocino Co.). Interestingly, there are no reports from the Sierra Nevada proper, the Central Valley, or Imperial Co. Such distributional voids in part reflect the scarcity of observers. The absence of records from Imperial County, where the species should occur with some regularity, probably is a result of birds being overlooked in the abundant habitat on the shores of the Salton Sea and in irrigated land (McCaskie, *in litt.*). The lack of records from the high Sierras and the Central Valley perhaps requires a different explanation (see Discussion).

Figure 2 depicts the seasonal pattern of records on the coast and in the eastern counties. This histogram is not based on the figure of 124 records (in which each different date or locality is considered a distinct record) but instead stresses the number of individual birds observed at one time and deemphasizes consecutive records of the same individual. Each month is divided into four weekly periods, the extreme dates of which are 1-8, 9-16, 17-24, and 25-31. One square

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is shaded for each individual recorded on the same date in the same locality. For those individuals that remained in one locality for more than one day, only one square is shaded per week. For example, if two birds were present at the same locality from 23 through 25 September, only two (not four) squares are shaded above the week 17-24 and two above the week 25-31.

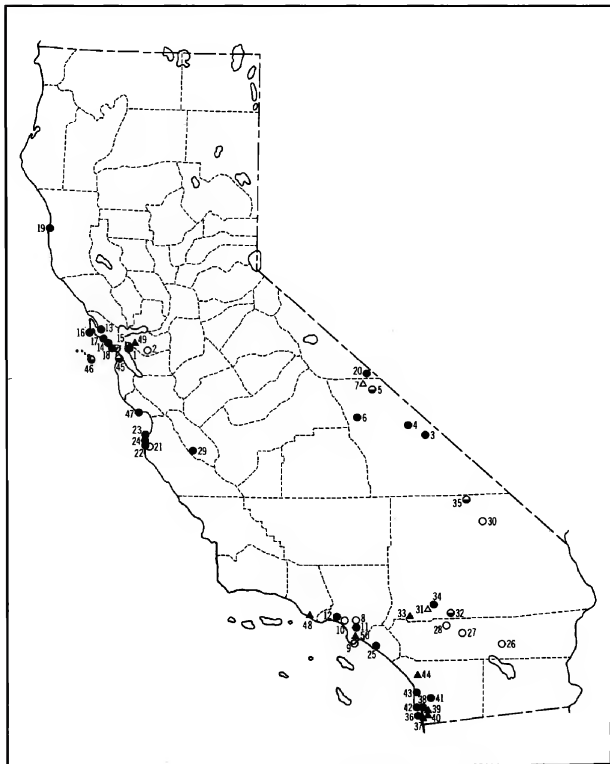


FIGURE 1. Geographic distribution of Northern Waterthrush records in California. Symbols represent the seasons and localities of occurrence, not individual records. Symbols: open circles indicate spring records; solid circles, fall; half-shaded circles, both spring and fall; solid triangles, winter; open triangles, summer.

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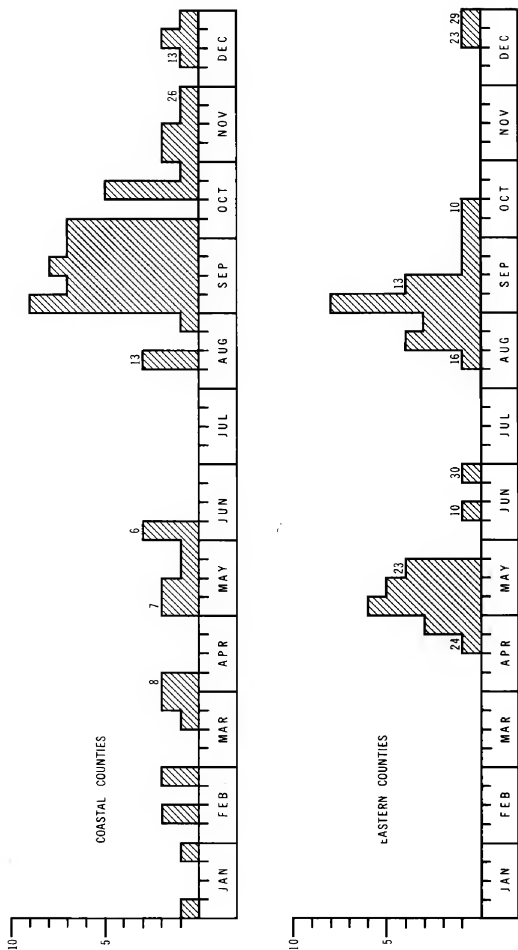


FIGURE 2. Seasonal pattern of Northern Waterthrush records in coastal and eastern counties of California. Numbers above columns indicate seasonal extreme dates. See text.

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In the following discussion, average arrival dates for the two migration periods have been computed simply by averaging the earliest dates for each year. For spring I have used only dates from the third week of April through the first week of June. For fall I have considered only dates from the second week of August through the first week of October. Because of the paucity of data, these average arrival dates are necessarily tentative. I doubt, however, that additional data will result in drastic modifications.

### FALL

In fall the Northern Waterthrush is a rare but regular vagrant (not migrant — see below) along the coast and a rare but regular migrant in the southeastern counties and east of the Sierra Nevada from Mono Co. southward. With one exception, extreme dates are as follows: for the migration period in eastern counties, 16 August to 13 September; for the "vagrant period" in coastal counties, 13 August to 26 November (see section on winter occurrence for discussion of November dates). All fall records for eastern counties after 13 September are the result of a single bird that remained at Death Valley National Monument from 10 September through 10 October; I do not consider as normal the dates resulting from this occurrence.

In fall the Northern Waterthrush arrives an average of 16 days earlier in the eastern counties than on the coast, the average arrival dates being 27 August and 12 September, respectively. The peak of occurrence inland also appears to be about two weeks earlier than on the coast. However, arrival time (both on the coast and in eastern counties) is about the same in northern counties as in southern counties. For example, birds arrive in the San Francisco area about the same time as in San Diego Co., and in Inyo Co. at approximately the same time (or a few days earlier) as in San Bernardino Co.

If all birds were arriving from the north, there should be no time lag between arrival dates in eastern and coastal counties, but there should be a lag between northern and southern counties. The opposite is true in both instances. If all birds were arriving from the east, they should negotiate the short distance between eastern and coastal counties in much less time than 16 days, particularly in view of the absence of records from the Central Valley (which would indicate that the birds pass quickly over this area) and in view of the migratory urge that is so strong as to take birds out over the Pacific

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Ocean to the Farallon Islands and probably beyond.

I suggest that there are two phenomena occurring. Firstly, in the latter part of August (averaging about 27 August) a regular migration begins along the eastern side of the Sierras and through the southeastern counties, these birds originating from their breeding grounds in the northwest and heading southeastward to wintering grounds on the mainland of western Mexico. Supporting this theory is the fact that eastern California migration dates (16 August to 13 September) are strikingly similar to the normal extreme dates recorded for Arizona, which are 17 August and 16 September (Phillips, et al., 1964). Secondly, about 16 days later (averaging about 12 September) another flight commences, this one involving vagrants arriving from the northeast along a broad front and heading southwestward to the coast, where they arrive only a few days later than in the eastern counties.

This theory would account for the 16-day time lag in arrival dates, the two week difference in peak abundance, and the similarity in arrival dates at all localities on the coast. It would also account for the comparative scarcity of spring records on the coast, the birds that reached the coast in the fall having continued their southwestward passage and perished in the Pacific Ocean. If this theory is correct, we might expect to find in the eastern counties a surge in abundance, nearly corresponding with arrival on the coast, that represents the vagrants superimposed on the regular migrating population. If this surge of vagrants were synchronous with the maximum time of abundance in regular migrants, there would be only one peak in the eastern counties. If, however, there were a lack of correspondence, there should be two peaks in the eastern areas. Figure 2 suggests that there is indeed such a surge, occurring in the first week of September and corresponding with a major influx on the coast. There is even some very weak indication of an additional peak about two weeks earlier at the time one might expect the regular migrants to be in maximum abundance. Obviously, many more data are needed to test this theory.

The larger number of fall records along the coast as compared with the eastern counties undoubtedly in part reflects the greater number of observers and the daily activity of the Point Reyes Bird Observatory's Farallon banding station. However, it also reflects, in my opinion, two natural phenomena. One is the effect of the ocean barrier, which concentrates the birds along the ocean edge and on the Farallones and thus makes them readily observable. The other is that



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these coastal vagrants apparently tend to remain longer in the state, often at one locality, and thus account for more late fall records (into October and November).

### SPRING

In spring the Northern Waterthrush is a casual vagrant along the coast from Los Angeles Co. northward and a rare but regular migrant in the southeastern counties and east of the Sierras from Inyo Co. (and probably Mono Co.) southward. Extreme dates are as follows: for the migration period in the eastern counties, 24 April to 23 May; for the "vagrant period" along the coast, 7 May to 6 June.

Because of the paucity of records, the data for spring are even more difficult to analyze than those for fall. Nevertheless, certain patterns seem to emerge. In the eastern part of the state migration appears to be normal, with the peak in early May and with the dates of occurrence progressively later from south to north (Riverside to San Bernardino to Inyo Cos.). The picture is quite different coastally, where there are only ten spring records, three from Los Angeles Co., one from Monterey Co., and six from the San Francisco Bay area. The species has not been recorded in spring in San Diego or Orange Cos.

The absence of records from San Diego and Orange Cos. indicates that the wintering populations in Baja California and western mainland Mexico do not return along the coast. I suggest that in spring, as in fall, there are two phenomena occurring. Firstly, birds wintering on the mainland of western Mexico and breeding in the northwest, pass regularly along a northwesterly course that takes them through northwestern Mexico, more or less parallel with the eastern shore of the Gulf of California, through Arizona and extreme southeastern California, and thence along the eastern side of the Sierras. Birds wintering in southern Baja California probably migrate north across the Gulf of California to Sinaloa and Sonora. Again, eastern California spring dates (24 April to 23 May) correspond well with the migration period in Arizona, which is 26 April to 24 May (Phillips, et al., 1964). The second phenomenon involves coastal occurrences, which I suspect represent a combination of three types of individuals: birds that wintered successfully in the state but were not detected until birders began to observe spring migration or until the birds moved into populated areas; birds that normally would migrate through eastern United States; and, finally, western migrants that are

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only slightly off course to the west, so that they intersect the coast from Los Angeles Co. northward. I consider all three types vagrants, in the broad sense of the term. Future investigation may indicate that there are different kinds of vagrancy. For instance, some birds could be irrevocably disoriented and never reach their breeding grounds. Others might be disoriented only temporarily. Still others might be headed correctly but be displaced by adverse environmental conditions (such as wind). Birds in the last two categories would be able to correct their direction and reach their destinations.

The very few records available suggest that the time lag noted between regular migrants and vagrants in fall also occurs in spring. The average arrival date for San Bernardino Co. is 7 May, while those for coastal counties are about two weeks later, 19 May for Los Angeles Co. and 22 May for San Francisco Co. The entire spring migration period is also about two weeks later on the coast: 7 May to 6 June vs. 24 April to 23 May. Again as in fall, coastal arrival dates for southern counties appear to be about the same as those for more northern counties, supporting the two-flight theory, with the vagrants arriving in the state some two weeks later, along a broader front from the southeast, and on long nonstop flights that carry them over the Sierra Nevada and Central Valley.

## WINTER

The Northern Waterthrush appears to be a casual winter resident along the extreme southern coast and an even rarer winter resident farther north. There are four instances of apparently successful wintering. A single bird was observed from 15 November 1958 to 15 February 1959 in Charles Lee Tilden Regional Park, Contra Costa Co. In San Diego Co. one bird was seen near Imperial Beach on 29 February and 28 March 1964, a second near Imperial Beach during the winter of 1967-68 (23 and 24 December, 1 and 28 January, 25 February, and 24 and 31 March), and a third in National City on 9, 15, and 16 February 1969.

The proper treatment of November and December records is debatable. Aside from the four definite winter occurrences, there are six November dates (involving four birds), all from the central coast in Marin and Monterey Cos., and six December dates (six birds), all from the southern coast in Los Angeles Co., San Diego Co., and the extreme western part of San Bernardino Co. Because of the geographic distribution of these records, with the earlier (November)

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dates embracing more northerly areas, where wintering is least likely, and the later (December) dates involving more southerly localities, where wintering is more likely, I prefer to treat November birds as late-moving vagrants and December ones as stationary wintering individuals. A convenient break in records between 26 November and 13 December (perhaps a real break for more northern counties) further enhances this treatment. The one exception to this theory is, of course, the winter record from Contra Costa Co., which suggests that some November birds are attempting to winter in northern areas but either succumb to environmental conditions or are simply overlooked by observers.

The only record for the period from January through early April not mentioned above is of two birds collected at Pt. Mugu, Ventura Co., on 8 April 1966. These almost certainly were wintering individuals rather than early vagrants, as there is no other spring record for the state before 24 April.

Thus, with only one exception (Contra Costa Co.), all definite winter records (January, February, and March) and all suspected winter records (December and 8 April) are from the southern coast in the counties of Ventura, Los Angeles, San Diego, and nearby western San Bernardino. It follows from the previous discussion that coastally wintering birds should be considered vagrants in origin. Whether or not they are able to return to their breeding grounds is unknown.

## SUMMER

There is only one record between 10 June and 13 August, a bird seen on 30 June 1968 at the east end of Big Bear Lake, San Bernardino Co. The Inyo Co. occurrence on 10 June, which represents either a vagrant from eastern United States or a very late western migrant, is here considered a summer record.

## DISCUSSION

The lack of Northern Waterthrush records for the Central Valley requires an explanation. All other eastern warbler vagrants, including the comparatively common American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla*, are also unaccountably rare or absent in the Valley. Many of these species, however, occur with much greater frequency along the Pacific coast and in the desert oases on the eastern side of the Sierra Nevada.

How do eastern vagrants reach the coast without being recorded in

the Central Valley? The obvious explanation is that vagrants do land in the Valley, but observer coverage is inadequate to detect a relatively small number of birds in an area that contains a considerable amount of suitable habitat. When more data are available, this explanation may well prove to be correct. In my opinion, however, the amount of suitable habitat is small enough and observer coverage, at least in the Sacramento area, is good enough to force us to explore other possibilities.

One possible explanation is that vagrants arrive from the north in fall and the south in spring, encounter the mountain ranges that enclose the northern and southern ends of the Valley, and are forced to veer either along the coast or along the eastern slopes of the Sierra Nevada. This could be the case with species such as the Northern Waterthrush that breed due north of California and winter to the southeast. However, the data indicate that Northern Waterthrushes do not migrate along the coast but occur there as vagrants, approaching from the northeast in the fall and the southeast in the spring, paths that should take them over the Central Valley. Many other vagrant species have breeding ranges confined to the eastern portions of the United States or Canada and hence must approach California from an easterly direction.

I would like to advance a new theory — one that seems to account for all the facts. I suggest that eastern vagrants do not bypass the Valley but rather fly nonstop directly over it. In my opinion, the Sierra Nevada (together with associated high ranges such as the White Mountains) acts as a barrier to vagrants. Birds arriving from the east, northeast, or southeast are forced to land when they encounter the high Sierras. Most of these westward-flying vagrants are night migrants and originate the evening before at varying distances to the east. Some probably intersect the mountains at dawn and are able to see and immediately enter the oases (the most suitable habitat), while others must arrive during darkness. These latter birds probably land at random in the desert lowlands and foothills and then during daylight converge on the oases. This theory would explain the great turnover of species and individuals within a single day in a given oasis (such as Deep Springs or Scotty's Castle; personal observations). It would also account for the scattering of vagrant records in relatively unsuitable desert habitat away from major oases. Thus what we have considered primarily an "oasis effect" in concentrating vagrants is secondary to the "barrier effect" of the Sierras.

I further suggest that the mountains act only as a temporary

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barrier. After a day or more of rest and feeding in the oases, the birds continue their westward flight. Since the coast is only some 220 miles distant, the birds are able to reach it in one night, passing completely over the Central Valley during darkness.

When the sun rises the next morning, some birds find themselves over the Pacific. Many of these birds probably perish, while others are able to return to the mainland or to the Farallon Islands. Other individuals probably reach the coast at dawn and are thus able to avoid (for that night) oversea passage. Hence the ocean acts as a barrier only during daylight hours, while the mountains present a barrier even at night. I believe that a few of these westward-moving individuals winter on the coast, but most eventually continue west and drown in the ocean.

The effect of wind direction and speed on take-off patterns in the eastern oases is unknown but may be extremely important. Possibly, vagrants do not leave into westerly winds but wait for calm or easterly winds. If such is the case, birds originating in these oases most certainly would be carried far beyond the Central Valley and probably well out over the ocean. Indeed, we do find that eastern vagrants are most common along the central California coast after nights of easterly winds (Point Reyes Bird Observatory banding records). There is also the possibility that storms or strong adverse winds suddenly encountered over the Central Valley would stall bird movement and precipitate vagrants there. Valley birders should watch for such occurrences.

In southern California the Sierra Nevada is replaced by lower and more broken mountain chains that probably pose little barrier to vagrants. Hence we find vagrants scattered throughout the southern quarter of the state and concentrated only along the coast and in desert oases.

While the above statements do appear to be consistent with the available information, they are only theories, based on very little data. Hopefully, my attempts at solution of this portion of the vagrant problem will stimulate other investigators to publish their findings.

## LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH

The Louisiana Waterthrush has been recorded in California only once: a male specimen (Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley, No. 1105) taken by Loye H. Miller (1908) on 17 August 1908 at

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Mecca, Riverside Co. Because the bird was found in a railroad yard, Dawson (1923) suggested that possibly it arrived through artificial means, either trapped in a freight car or as the captive of some passenger. These possibilities are, in my opinion, far less likely than natural occurrence. The bird was taken near an artesian well, which was surrounded by trees and was doubtless the only source of fresh water and the only suitable habitat within many miles.

Probably this species occurs with much the same frequency as the Hooded Warbler *Wilsonia citrina*, which has a similar range and migratory pattern, but has been overlooked because of its secretive habits or similarity to the Northern Waterthrush. While the Louisiana Waterthrush might occur anywhere in the state, and perhaps will be found first on the Farallon Islands, I suspect that it will prove to be of greatest frequency in the desert oases of the extreme southeastern counties. Since the species has been recorded in Arizona (Snider, 1970) and Sonora (Miller, et al, 1957) and winters regularly in the Pacific lowlands of central Mexico (Alden, 1969), it should be expected in California at least as a casual vagrant.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Theodore Chandik and Guy McCaskie for making available all the records in their possession. Don Bleiz, Howard Cogswell, Roland H. Wauer, and Vernal L. Yadon kindly supplied data on certain observations. The theoretical considerations presented herein benefited greatly from discussions with David DeSante, Ronald LeValley, and Tim Manolis.

## SUMMARY

The Louisiana Waterthrush has been recorded only once in California: 17 August 1908 at Mecca, Riverside Co. Probably it has been overlooked and will prove to be a casual vagrant, at least in the southeastern portion of the state.

For the Northern Waterthrush I have located 124 California records, embracing 16 counties and every month except July. All but one record (San Benito Co.) are for counties that border either the ocean or the states to the east.

Along the coast, where all birds are here considered vagrant in origin, the species is casual in spring from Los Angeles Co. northward

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(7 May - 6 June) and rare but regular in fall (13 August - 26 November). In eastern counties it is a rare but regular migrant both in spring (24 April - 23 May) and fall (16 August - 13 September); numbers here are augmented by vagrants from farther east. The species is a winter resident along the coast, casual in San Diego Co. and probably in Ventura, Los Angeles, and western San Bernardino Cos., and even rarer farther north (one record: Contra Costa Co.). The only two summer records are from Inyo and San Bernardino Cos. There are no records for the Sierra Nevada proper or for the Central Valley.

Although based on very limited data, certain conjectures seem warranted. These may apply to other eastern vagrants as well. There is a regular migration through the eastern counties in both spring and fall. Two weeks after the commencement of this migration, a flight of vagrants arrives from the northeast, southeast, or east. It is suggested that the Sierra Nevada acts as a barrier that forces these night-moving vagrants to land in the desert region at the eastern base of the mountains. During daylight the oases further concentrate the vagrants. At a later date these birds continue westward, passing at night completely over the high Sierras and Central Valley. At dawn most birds find themselves over water and either drown or manage to struggle back to the coast or islands, where they are thus concentrated. A few of the latter individuals attempt to winter on the coast, but most probably continue their westward passage and perish in the ocean. The barrier effect of the Sierras is not felt in southern California; birds there are concentrated only along the coast or in the scattered desert oases.

## APPENDIX

Listed below are the California records (through 1969) of which I am aware. Most are published, having been gleaned from Grinnel and Miller (1944), all issues from 1940 through 1969 of *The Auk*, *The Condor*, *The Wilson Bulletin*, and *Audubon Field Notes*, and from several miscellaneous papers that came to my attention. Additional notes were obtained from the banding records of the Point Reyes Bird Observatory and from several private individuals. I have made no attempt to verify most reports, although it should be noted that the records include 11 birds that were found dead or were collected and 21 others that were banded (some of which were photographed). Probably no more than one or two, if any, of the sight records represent misidentifications.

Records are listed alphabetically by county and exact locality and chronologically within each locality. Dates are followed by the names of the observers and number of birds recorded. Numbers in parentheses refer to localities on the map (fig. 1). Band numbers mentioned are of regulation U. S. Fish and Wildlife

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- Service bands. Museum specimen numbers were obtained from the literature; I made no attempt to examine the specimens.
- Alameda Co. (1) Oakland, Dimond Canyon: 6 Sep. 1953, Kenneth Schulz, 1 seen.
- Contra Costa Co. (49) Charles Lee Tilden Regional Park (near Berkeley), Jewell Lake: 15 Nov. 1958 and 15 Feb. 1959 (and presumably on some intermediate dates), Edwin O. Willis, et al., 1 seen. (2) Along creek near St. Mary's College: 27 May 1962, Arthur S. Campbell, 1 seen.
- Inyo Co. (3) Death Valley National Monument, Furnace Creek: 21 Aug. 1960, Roland H. Wauer, 1 seen; 18 Aug. 1961, Roland H. Wauer, 1 collected (D.V.N.M. 4014); 28 Aug. 1961, Roland H. Wauer, 1 found dead (specimen at D.V.N.M.); 29 Aug. 1961, Roland H. Wauer, 1 seen; 1 Sep. 1968, Clifford R. Lyons, Guy McCaskie, 3 seen. (4) Death Valley National Monument, Emigrant Ranger Station: 10 Sep. to 10 Oct. 1964, Bruce B. Paige, 1 banded and remained. (5) Deep Springs: 24 Aug. 1963, Richard Stallcup, 2 seen; 12 (1 seen) and 13 (2 seen) Sep. 1964, Ted Chase, Art Wang; 13 Sep. 1967, Richard Stallcup, 1 seen; 4 Sep. 1968, Michael Perrone, 1 seen; 20 (1 banded), 21 (another banded), 22 (unbanded bird seen), and 23 (same two banded birds seen) May 1969, David DeSante. (6) near Lone Pine: 1 Sep. 1967, Mike San Miguel, 1 banded. (7) Wyman Canyon: 10 June 1967, Alan M. Craig, David DeSante, Guy McCaskie, Richard Stallcup, 1 seen and heard singing. Note: Wauer's (1960) record for Wildrose Campground, Panamint Mountains, Inyo Co., on 10 May 1959 was actually an Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapillus*) (Wauer, *in litt.*).
- Los Angeles Co. (8) Altadena: 15 May 1933, Jacob B. Abbott, 1 seen. (9) Averill Park: 7 May 1968, Grace Nixon, G. Shumway Suffel, 1 seen. (10) Los Angeles, U.C.L.A. Botanical Gardens: 4 June 1959, H. B. Chaney, 1 seen. (50) Los Angeles, Harbor City, Harbor Park, Harbor Lake (=Bixby Slough): Dec. 1958, observers unknown, 1 seen. (11) Pasadena, Johnson's Lake: 2 Sep. 1939, Howard Cogswell, 1 seen. (12) Topanga Canyon, about 1 mile north of Pacific Ocean: 14 Sep. 1962, Don Bleitz, 1 banded and photographed.
- Marin Co. (13) Inverness: 24 Nov. 1969, William M. Pursell, 1 seen. (14) Muir Woods, Bootjack Trail: 13 Aug. 1916, Harold E. Hansen, et al., 2 seen. (15) Point Bonita: 6 June 1965, Richard Stallcup, 1 seen. (16) Point Reyes Peninsula: 21 and 22 Oct. 1962, Janet Kroesen, Grace Miller, C. John Ralph, Richard Stallcup, 1 seen each day; 19 Sep. 1967, Richard Stallcup, 1 seen. (17) Point Reyes Bird Observatory: Abalone Flat, 9 (1 banded; band no. 114-03390) and 10 (same bird recaptured) Sep. 1966, Phil R. Lenna; 17 Sep. 1966, Phil R. Lenna, C. John Ralph, 1 banded (band no. 114-31186). (18) Rodeo Lagoon: south side, Oct. 1928, C. W. Lockerbie, 1 seen; south side, 18 Oct. 1931, Charles A. Bryant, 2 seen; 11 Sep. 1966, David DeSante, 1 (possibly 2) seen.
- Mendocino Co. (19) MacKerricher Beach State Park: 17 Oct. 1959 and for several days thereafter, James B. Stickel, 1 seen.
- Mono Co. (20) Oasis: 26 Aug. 1965, Marianne Shepard, 1 banded.
- Monterey Co. (21) Carmel River near Robinson Canyon: 8 May 1966, William Reese, 1 seen. (22) Carmel River at or near sewage disposal plant: 6 (Ronald L. Branson), 7 (William Reese, Vernal L. Yadon), and 14 (Ronald L. Branson) Nov. 1965, 1 seen each day; 18 and 25 Sep. 1966, Alan Baldrige, Ronald L. Branson, William Reese, Vernal L. Yadon, 1 seen each day; 9 Sep. 1967, Alan Baldrige, 1 seen; 26 Nov. 1967, William Reese, 1 seen; 23 Sep. 1968, Ronald L. Branson, 1 seen; 3 (Lee Jones) and 5 (L. C. Binford, Joseph Greenberg, Russ Greenberg) Oct. 1969, 1 seen each day.



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- (23) Pacific Grove, Nelson's residence: 4 Sep. 1969, Marguerite Johnson, Mr. and Mrs. B. Gordon Nelson, Vernal L. Yadon, 1 seen. (24) Pebble Beach: 2 Nov. 1965, Frank Culin, 1 found dead (specimen in Pacific Grove Museum).
- Orange Co. (25) Newport Beach: 19 Sep. 1963, Jim Lane, Vanche Plum, 1 seen.
- Riverside Co. (26) Joshua Tree National Monument,  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile north of Cottonwood Springs Campground: 27 Apr. 1958, Don Bleitz, 1 banded. (27) Thousand Palms Oasis: 24 (Marion Wilson, Russell Wilson) and 27 (J. H. Comby) Apr. 1959, 1 seen each day. (28) Whitewater Canyon: 3 May 1969, Ralph Manke, 1 seen. Note: McCaskie (*in litt.*) suggests, and I agree, that the 4 June 1959 record mentioned by Pyle and Small (1961) was erroneously attributed to Thousand Palms Oasis, Riverside Co., and instead should have been cited for the U.C.L.A. Botanical Gardens in Los Angeles.
- San Benito Co. (29) Pinnacles National Monument, headquarters: 1 Sep. 1954, Betty Jackson, D. Bruce Jackson, 1 seen.
- San Bernardino Co. (30) near Baker: 17 and 18 May 1969, Ralph Manke, G. Shumway Suffel, 1 seen each day. (31) Big Bear Lake, at east end: 30 June 1968, Ellen Stephenson, 1 seen. (32) Morongo Valley: 12 May 1962, Guy McCaskie, 2 seen; 11 May 1963, Guy McCaskie, et al., 1 seen; 8 (2 seen) and 9 (1 banded) May 1965, Alan M. Craig, Guy McCaskie; 7 May 1966, Guy McCaskie, 1 seen; 3 (1 seen, Guy McCaskie), 10 (1 banded, Mike San Miguel) and 12 (banded bird retrapped, Mike San Miguel) May 1968; 3 and 4 May 1969, Mike San Miguel, 1 seen each day; 8 Sep. 1969, David Beyers, 1 seen. (33) near San Bernardino: 23 Dec. 1952, San Bernardino Audubon Society, 1 seen; 29 Dec. 1953, Ethel West, 1 seen. (34) San Bernardino Mountains, Cactus Flat, 100 yards behind Jim Johnson's house, 6,000 feet elevation: 16 Aug. 1905, Joseph Grinnell, 1 collected (immature female, Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley, No. 37720). (35) Death Valley National Monument, Saratoga Springs: 25 and 26 Apr. 1968, George T. Austin, 1 seen each day; 1 Sep. 1968, Clifford R. Lyons, Guy McCaskie, 2 seen.
- San Diego Co. (36) Imperial Beach: 7 Sep. 1964, Guy McCaskie, 1 seen; 28 Oct. 1964, Guy McCaskie, 1 seen. (37) near Imperial Beach: 29 Feb. and 28 Mar. 1964, Guy McCaskie, 1 seen each day (believed by McCaskie to be same bird); 23 and 24 Dec. 1967, 1 and 28 Jan., 25 Feb., 24 and 31 Mar. 1968, various observers on different dates, including Pierre Devillers, Xenia Devillers, Joseph Greenberg, Guy McCaskie, and Edwin O. Willis, 1 seen each day; 13 Dec. 1969, Guy McCaskie, 1 seen. (38) near National City, about 1 mile from San Diego Bay: 29 Sep. 1906, C. B. Linton, 1 seen and another collected (female, Thayer Collection No. 16661). (39) in National City: 9 (Guy McCaskie), 15 (Virginia Coughran, Alan M. Craig, Pierre Devillers, Clifford R. Lyons, Guy McCaskie, Edwin O. Willis), and 16 (Virginia Coughran, Alan M. Craig, Pierre Devillers, Clifford R. Lyons, Edwin O. Willis) Feb. 1969, 1 seen each day. (40) near Otay: 20 Dec. 1968, Paul Opler, 1 seen. (41) Poway: 3 Oct. 1961, John D. Kent, 1 seen. (42) San Diego: 11 Sep. 1887, A. M. Ingersoll, 1 collected (found dead); 13 Aug. 1966, Richard Stallcup, 1 seen; Pt. Loma, 25 Sep. 1965, David Gaines, Guy McCaskie, Larry Sansone, 1 seen; Pt. Loma, 17 Sep. 1967, Alan M. Craig, et al., 1 banded. (43) Solana Beach: 2 Sep. 1965, Alan M. Craig, Guy McCaskie, 1 seen. (44) near Vista: 26 Dec. 1969, Alice Fries, 1 seen.
- San Francisco Co. (45) San Francisco: Golden Gate Park, Middle Lake in Chain of Lakes, 14 Sep. 1929, Mr. and Mrs. Albert B. Stephens, 1 seen; Golden Gate Park, pond west of Middle Lake, 8 Oct. 1932, Henry E. Parmenter, 1

## WATERTHRUSHES IN CALIFORNIA

- seen; Lake Merced, 17 Oct. 1933, Henry E. Parmenter, 1 seen; Lake Merced, 9 May 1956, Ed Hase, Chas. Hines, et al., 1 seen. (46) Southeast Farallon Island: sometime between 7 and 14 June 1967, C. John Ralph, John Smail, 1 found dead; 24 (2 seen) and 25 (2 banded) Sep. 1967, C. John Ralph, Henry Robert, Richard Stallcup (band nos. 114-31571 and 114-31582; photographs of both banded birds in Point Reyes Bird Observatory file); 31 August, 1968, Ronald LeValley, 1 banded (band no. 117-74533); 1 Sep. 1968, Ronald LeValley, 1 banded (band no. 117-74573); 5 Sep. 1968, Point Reyes Bird Observatory personnel, 2 seen; 3 Oct. 1968, Guy McCaskie, L. Richard Mewaldt, 1 banded (band no. 117-74877); 4 Oct. 1968, Richard Stallcup, 2 seen and another banded (band no. 117-74905); 20 May 1969, Henry Robert, 1 banded (band no. 117-75621) and photographed; 2 June 1969, John Smail, 1 banded (band no. 117-75679); 10 Sep. 1969, Fred Sibley, 1 banded (band no. 117-76189).
- Santa Cruz Co. (47) Santa Cruz: a few days before 25 Sep. 1885, J. R. Chalker, 1 collected (female); 25 Sep. 1885, A. M. Ingersoll, 1 collected (female, U. S. National Museum No. 106062); 4 Oct. 1967, David Gaines, 1 seen.
- Ventura Co. (48) Pt. Mugu: 8 Apr. 1966, G. Shumway Suffel, 2 collected (Los Angeles County Museum).

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## NOTES

### BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER RECORDS FOR SOUTHEASTERN OREGON

On 9 October 1957 David B. Marshall (1959) collected a male Black-throated Blue Warbler *Dendroica caerulescens* at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Harney County, Oregon. The bird was taken from the group of trees at the refuge headquarters, and it represented the first Oregon record. Eugene Kridler (Kridler and Marshall, 1962) collected a second male from the same group of trees on 27 September 1960. Eugene Kridler (1965) banded a male at Malheur refuge headquarters on 24 October 1961 and recaptured it two days later in the same area. He also observed another male at headquarters on 2, 3 and 4 May 1963.

Since that date two additional records have occurred on Malheur National Wildlife Refuge for the fifth and sixth records for Oregon. A male was observed and photographed at refuge headquarters by Bruce Deuel on 8 October 1969, and another male was captured and banded there on 11 October 1970 by Carroll D. Littlefield. The 1970 bird was in excellent plumage, but the condition of the skull was not examined; therefore the age could not be determined.

The Black-throated Blue Warbler is now considered an occasional fall vagrant and an accidental spring vagrant in southeast Oregon. It is noteworthy that all six Oregon records have occurred in one location, thus providing insight to the western route the species could be following. Since the Black-throated Blue Warbler is considered a regular fall vagrant in California, it is possible the birds are migrating into that state through southeastern Oregon. There is some indication that this may be the route other species (i.e., Brown Thrasher, *Toxostoma rufum*; Black and White Warbler, *Mniotilta varia*; Tennessee Warbler, *Vermivora peregrina*; Ovenbird, *Seiurus aurocapillus*; Baltimore Oriole, *Icterus galbula*) are using since they have been recorded on Malheur NWR in recent years. Continued banding on Malheur NWR should produce additional information on this subject.

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- Carroll D. Littlefield, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona 85721; and Eldon L. McLaury (Biologist), Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Burns, Oregon.
- Calif. Birds 2:93, 1971

## FIRST RECORD OF WHITE-EYED VIREO IN CALIFORNIA

AT approximately 10:00 hours on 4 June 1969 an adult White-eyed Vireo *Vireo griseus* was found in a mist net near the Monterey Cypress tree in the yard of the coast guard living quarters on Southeast Farallon Island, San Francisco County, California. John Smail examined, measured, and banded this bird. Its weight was 10.9 grams, having only a trace of fat visible beneath the skin. Ossification of the cranium was complete. I took several color photographs of this bird and released it. It was recaptured at 09:00 the next morning, and several more times during the day, but was not seen after 5 June. Color prints of the photographs taken of this bird are on file at the Point Reyes Bird Observatory and the San Diego Natural History Museum. These photographs show the identifying morphological characters including the white iris, yellow eye-ring, and yellow above the lores. This is the first record of this species in California.



FIGURE 1. A White-eyed Vireo *Vireo griseus* mist-netted on Southeast Farallon Island off San Francisco, California, on 4 June 1969. The color slides, from which these two prints were made, show the crown olive-brown to grayish from which these two prints were made, show the crown olive-brown to grayish on hindneck; a conspicuous stripe from base of bill to eye yellow, and this yellow extends around the eye merging into gray face; lores blackish; underparts pale grayish-white, white on chin, and tinged yellow along sides and flanks; wing dark grayish-brown, lesser coverts edged grayish-green, middle and greater coverts tipped with white. Bill blue-gray with small patch of pale horn at tip of upper mandible; iris pure white. The black visible on the throat in one of the pictures is merely the result of feathers being disarranged.

Photo by Henry Robert

The A.O.U. (Check-list, 1957) lists accidental records of the White-eyed Vireo in the West for Boulder, Utah, and Cochise County, Arizona. The Utah specimen was collected on the Hall Ranch, 8 miles west of Boulder, on 11 May 1953, and was referred to the race *novaboracensis* by Porter and Bushman (Wilson Bulletin 68:152-153, 1956). According to Phillips et al. (The Birds of Arizona, 1964) the Cochise County, Arizona, record was found to be based on a clerical error, the specimen in question being a Gray Flycatcher *Empidonax wrightii* (formerly *Empidonax griseus*). Snider (Audubon Field Notes 21:65, 1967) reported one seen near Tucson, Arizona, on 13 November 1966. The observer, Edwin Willis, informed me in a letter dated 10 September 1970 that the bird was seen in Pima Canyon in the Santa Catalina Mountains. Henry Robert, Point Reyes Bird Observatory, Mesa Road, Bolinas, California 94924.

## A PROTHONOTARY WARBLER IN INYO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

On 5 September 1970, at about 11:00 a.m., while checking for birds on the grounds of Deep Springs College in eastern California, Mike Ward and I discovered a brightly plumaged Prothonotary Warbler *Prothonotaria citrea*. The weather was cool, clear, and there was a very strong northerly wind blowing. The bird was first observed feeding alternately between an apple tree and a squash patch in a vegetable garden. While attempting to secure permission to set some mist nets in order to band the bird, it was discovered that Kim Garrett and John Dunn had independently seen the bird at about 8:00 a.m. on the same day. They also confirmed the fact that the bird was a Prothonotary Warbler. After obtaining permission from the school officials, the bird was netted, banded and photographed. Before releasing the bird the following description was taken:

A large warbler with a large bill and comparatively heavy body. Underparts: head entirely orangish-yellow down through the nape, with crown and forehead slightly tinged olive; shoulders and back burnt-orange; rump blue-gray. Underparts: chin, throat, cheeks, breast, flanks and belly bright gold; under tail coverts pure white. Wing: wing coverts bluish-gray; primaries and secondaries bluish-gray with translucent light gray along outer edges giving a frosted appearance to the wing. Tail: dark gray shading to slate at tip, large white spots on inner webs of feathers visible when fanned. Soft parts: eye black; bill long, pointed and large, upper mandible slate, lower mandible light gray; legs bluish-gray.

On the following day, 6 September, the bird was renetted and held captive for the remainder of the day by one of the students (Mike Houston) of the college for orientation experiments. During the night the bird became very weak, and was dead the following morning. The bird was kept as a specimen (#37621, San Diego Natural History Museum), and found to be a male with the skull incompletely ossified.

The Prothonotary Warbler normally breeds in the wooded swamps of the southeastern United States. The western limit of the breeding range extends from central eastern Minnesota southward to eastern Texas, and the winter range extends from the Yucatan Peninsula southward through Central America to central Columbia and northern Venezuela (A.O.U., Check-list of North American Birds, 1957). It has occurred casually or accidentally to the west of its normal breeding range with records from Wyoming (A.O.U., op. cit.), Colorado (L. M. Bailey and R. J. Niedrach, Birds of Colorado, 1965), New Mexico (J. P. Hubbard, Check-list of the Birds of New Mexico, 1970), Nevada (F. A. Ryser, Condor, 65:334, 1963), and Arizona (A. Phillips, J. Marshall and G. Monson, The Birds of Arizona, 1964), as well as from California.

In California I know of nine records in addition to the one presented. Spring occurrences include an adult male collected 8 miles east of Shandon, San Luis Obispo County, on 22 May 1963 by E. B. McMillan (specimen deposited in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley [checked by G. McC]); one found dead in Mission Canyon, Santa Barbara, on 25 May 1953 (M. Hillman, Condor, 56:52, 1954) (this specimen was not destroyed in the 1961 fire at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, and was checked by G. McC), and one seen at sea from a boat near the Los Coronados Islands off northern Baja California on 27 May 1967 by J. Jehl (Audubon Field Notes, 21:541, 1967 - no additional details). Fall records include one seen in Morro Bay State Park, San Luis Obispo County, between 2 and 6 October 1965 by B.



FIGURE 1. An immature male Prothonotary Warbler *Prothonotaria citrea* found at Deep Springs, Inyo County, California, on 5 September 1970.

Photo by Mike Ward

Broadbooks, E. A. Pugh and others (description on file); one seen in San Pedro, Los Angeles County, on 8 October 1965 by D. Paulson (description on file); one seen briefly on Point Loma, San Diego County, on 4 November 1967 by A. Craig and T. Taylor (Audubon Field Notes, 22:91, 1968 - no additional details); one seen and photographed at Willow Creek, on the coast of southern Monterey County, between 3 and 7 December 1967 by A. Baldrige, R. L. Branson and others (one color slide and description on file); one seen near the Cliff House in San Francisco on 30 August 1969 by V. G. DaCosta and B. Sutherland (description on file), and one seen on Point Loma, San Diego County, on 27 September 1969 by D. Bohlen, G. McCaskie, P. Devillers and others (description on file). An observation reported from Morongo Valley, San Bernardino County, in May 1963 (Audubon Field Notes, 17:435, 1963) is unsupported and considered unreliable (G. McCaskie, pers. comm.).

In each of the cases where the sight record is supported by details, I have studied the descriptions and photographs, and am convinced of their validity. The descriptions and photographs are deposited in the files of the California Field Ornithologists at the San Diego Natural History Museum. Mike San Miguel, 610 Greenbank Avenue, Duarte, California 91010.

## RED PHALAROPE MORTALITY IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

In southern California, Red Phalaropes *Phalaropus fulicarius* are fairly common fall migrants, although their abundance varies from year to year. They are most often seen on the open ocean, but they occasionally occur near shore, and in some years numbers appear on coastal ponds.

Beginning on 17 November 1969 Red Phalaropes were reported dead and dying on the beach of southern California from San Diego northward for at least 50 miles. The extent of this die-off is not known but was apparently quite large since it received notice in local newspapers. On 22 November, dead Red Phalaropes were observed in the water on several occasions and were being fed upon by Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis* and large gulls *Larus* sp. Over a dozen birds were found floating in the kelp beds near the Coronados Islands, Baja California, and observations on the islands the following May revealed several skeletons of phalaropes that had been plucked clean by gulls. In late December there were reports of a few whitish sandpipers, presumably phalaropes, dead on the beach near the tip of Baja California, and also of more dying birds on the beach north of San Diego. At that time abnormally high numbers of Red Phalaropes were found walking along the beaches, searching for food in kelp cast up by the waves.

Twenty specimens picked up from beaches in the San Diego area in late November were donated to the San Diego Natural History Museum. In each case they were found to be in a starved condition, weighing only half as much as birds collected on the breeding grounds in June. Weights of 13 females ranged from 27.3-45.5 grams with an average of 33.2 grams; of six males from 23.6-31.6 grams with an average of 27.7 grams; one unsexed bird weighed 31.8 grams. Weights of Red Phalaropes from Victoria Island, Canada (Parmelee, Stevens, and Schmidt, Natl. Mus. Canada Bull. 22: 140, 1967), collected in June are: eight females, 49.5-77.0 (62.2) grams; nine males, 43.0-60.0 (53.3) grams.

The stomachs of most birds were empty except that they all contained small whitish or orange balls, 1.7 to 4.4 mm in diameter, of a synthetic nature. Most birds contained only a few balls but one contained as many as 36. The source of this material, which also was washed-up along the tide line on the beach in the La Jolla area, could not be identified. Mr. Gary Smith, of Scripps Institute of Oceanography, reported (pers. com.) that the material was largely inert. Several stomachs contained chink shells *Lacuna* sp., which occur normally on the kelp, but no other food remains were encountered.

Apparently the abundance of surface plankton in southern California was much reduced in the fall of 1969. One possible indication of surface food shortage is that on 22 November many Sooty Shearwaters *Puffinus griseus* were seen diving for food but none were observed feeding at the surface. Both feeding methods are used by this species. It appears that phalaropes were unable to find adequate food at sea. Those that came ashore to feed along the wrack line and in coastal ponds probably encountered better feeding conditions. Those that tried to subsist at sea on the floating balls died of starvation. A previous report of mortality (Ross, Condor 24: 66-67, 1922) that occurred in October 1921 also indicated that the birds were thin.

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# ROADSIDE DISTRIBUTION OF THE COMMON RAVEN IN THE MOHAVE DESERT

Common Ravens *Corvus corax* are familiar roadside birds in much of the southwestern United States. I counted ravens during nearly 5500 miles of travel through the Mohave Desert of southern Nevada (Clark County) and adjacent California (San Bernardino County) in 1967-1969. Observations were limited to areas below 4500 feet in Lower Sonoran desert away from major waterways and irrigated land. Data were divided into four time periods (table 1) and into those obtained along major routes and those along lightly used roads.

Raven density along roads is greatest during winter and least in summer (table 1). More than twice as many ravens were found along major routes than along comparable secondary roads. Thus, major highways may strongly influence raven distribution in this area since they provide an easily found, and relatively dependable, food supply of road-killed animals. There is less animal mortality along secondary roads, and this is reflected by raven density. The following road-killed animals were observed being consumed (number of observations in parentheses): large Orthoptera (1), *Crotalus* sp. (2), unidentified snakes (3), *Citellus leucurus* (2), *Sylvilagus* sp. (3), and *Lepus californicus* (1). The species' habits of scavenging are well known (Bent, U. S. Nat'l. Mus. Bull. 191, 1946).

TABLE 1. Roadside distribution of the Common Raven in the Mohave Desert.

Season	Number of Ravens	Number of Miles	Miles per Raven	x no. of Ravens per 100 miles
MAIN ROADS				
November-February	38	1125	29.6	3.38
March-April	13	862	66.3	1.51
May-August	11	1463	133.0	0.75
September-October	17	870	51.2	1.95
total	79	4320	54.7	1.83
SECONDARY ROADS				
total	9	1132	125.8	0.79

There is an indication that summer distribution is limited to areas near water. Between Las Vegas, Nevada, and Baker, California, all my summer observations are less than 15 miles from available water, while observations at other seasons are more evenly distributed. Also of interest is a flock of 40 ravens (not included in table 1) near Baker, California, on 27 February 1968 at 0615. Five hours later they were gone. This is an unusually large flock for this species which, unlike the White-necked Raven *Corvus cryptoleucus*, tends to be found in pairs throughout the year (Bent, *op. cit.*). Field work was supported in part by National Park Service contract number 14-10-0434-1989 to J. E. Deacon.  
 George T. Austin, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona 85721.



## A PYRRHULOXIA WANDERS WEST TO CALIFORNIA

On 24 February 1971 Jim Fairchild briefly glimpsed a Pyrrhuloxia *Cardinalis sinuata* feeding on the ground at Weise Spring Station about 8 miles west of Westmorland, Imperial County, California. He managed to see that the bird was a large grayish finch with a red crest, some red on the face and breast, and having a short stout yellowish bill. Unfortunately, a passing vehicle flushed the bird, and it was not relocated in the following hour of searching.

Four days later, on 28 February, I checked Weise Spring Station along with Lee Jones, G. Shumway Suffel and two others. We had no trouble locating the Pyrrhuloxia, and had ample opportunities to study the bird as it foraged around the area with a flock of White-crowned Sparrows *Zonotrichia leucophrys*, and even sat on exposed perches to sing. The following description is taken from my notes:

The bird was about the size of an Albert's Towhee *Pipilo aberti*, but appeared smaller bodied and longer tailed, and looked very much like a Cardinal *Cardinalis cardinalis*.

Underparts: forehead, crown, nape, back and rump, gray tinged olive-brown; long crest feathers on top of head, mostly red, but appeared gray towards base. Underparts: breast, belly, flanks and under tail coverts, gray, being palest on the belly and darkest along the flanks; chin and throat red, then red intermingled with gray extending down center of breast to upper belly, some red on under tail coverts; feathers on the upper legs bright red. Face: area around the base of the bill, red with no black flecking visible; bold red ring around eye. Wings: upper wing coverts, gray tinged olive-brown as back; primaries and secondaries, dark gray, the inner webs of these feathers appearing reddish; under wing coverts, mostly red (seen only when bird was in flight). Tail: tail feathers, dark gray tinged olive-brown, appearing darker than back and being darkest towards tip; inner webs of feathers, particularly basal half of outer four or five, reddish. Soft parts: bill, short and stout with both mandibles strongly curved, yellow; tarsus and feet, blackish-gray; eye, blackish.

The feathers looked fresh, and it appears the bird was in adult male plumage. A check with the persons living at Weise Spring Station indicated no cage birds had been released in the area, but one woman recalled having seen a bird with red on it around the area during the previous few weeks. Weise Spring Station is situated at the northwest corner of the intensively cultivated Imperial Valley, having flat cultivated fields on one side, and dry desert with some Creosote Bush *Larrea*, Mesquite *Prosopis*, and other plant-life of the Colorado Desert on the other side. At the station itself there are a number of Tamarisk Trees *Tamarix*, a small grass pasture, and a couple of fresh-water pools. The Pyrrhuloxia was subsequently seen by a number of interested persons, but could not be located again after 7 March.

The Pyrrhuloxia is a bird of the Lower Sonoran Zone, extending from southern Arizona and southern Texas through most of northern Mexico (A.O.U. Check-list of North American Birds, 1957). The race *C. s. peninsulae* is resident in the southern half of Baja California, and *C. s. fulvescens* is the form found in southern Arizona and northwestern Mexico. In southern Arizona the species occurs regularly west to the Ajo region, and has been recorded to the Castle Dome Mountains of southwestern Yuma County (Phillips et al. The Birds of Arizona, 1964), not more than 100 miles from Weise Spring Station. The species is also reported to wander during the winter, being found regularly away from breeding areas in some parts of Arizona (Phillips et al., loc. cit.)

## NOTES

In California there are two previous reports of the *Pyrrhuloxia*. Small (Audubon Field Notes, 7:236, 1953) records one, reported second hand, near Mecca, Riverside County, on 10 February 1953, and briefly glimpsed there again on 29 March. A male was seen at Cottonwood Springs, Riverside County, on 6 and 7 May 1961 (A.F.N. 14:440, 1961). No details accompany either record, and it is impossible to determine their validity. However, it is interesting to note the Mecca bird is included by Pyle (Annotated Field List of the Birds of Southern California, 1953) under "Additional Species," but was omitted when the list was revised by Small in 1961. There is a strong possibility the bird at Cottonwood Springs was released there after having been imported for photographic purposes, and much was rumored to this effect at the time of the observation.

It is wise to be cautious of sight records of the *Pyrrhuloxia*, for the Cardinal can sometimes look remarkably similar, and has been misidentified as this species. On 4 August 1968 Alan Craig and I checked a report of a "*Pyrrhuloxia*" frequenting a trailer park near Earp on the Colorado River. We managed to see the bird, but it was only a Cardinal, apparently a male molting into adult plumage. The bird was quite gray on the face and along the flanks, with the center of the breast, from the throat to the under tail coverts, bright red; the upper parts were brownish-gray, and the bird closely resembled the illustrations of adult male *Pyrrhuloxias* in the popular field guides (e.g. Robbins et al. A Guide to Field Identification. Birds of North America, 1966); however, the bill was pinkish, and clearly that of a Cardinal.

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## A PROBABLE SWIFT-CACTUS COLLISION

In the normal scheme of things swifts fly high above the ground in search of various arthropods, mostly insects, which are carried aloft. They also utilize several less typical foraging tactics on some occasions. These would include sweeping up against forest trees (Collins, 1968; Fischer, 1958) or dropping helicopter-fashion down through the foliage (George, 1971) to gather food items, as well as low level foraging flights over ground or water. The latter tactic is frequently utilized during particularly cold and/or stormy weather when few flying insects are available (Lack and Owen, 1955).

On several days, between 24 April and 6 May 1971, numerous Vaux's Swifts *Chaetura vauxi* and an occasional White-throated Swift *Aeronautes saxatalis* were noticed foraging low over the surface of a small pond near the mouth of Big Morongo Canyon in Morongo Valley, San Bernardino County, California, amidst a mixed flock of five species of swallows.

A total of 37 Vaux's Swifts were captured at the pond as a part of bird banding operations. One of these birds (no. 72-00513), captured on 3 May 1971, was found to have a spine partially embedded in the breast musculature near the furcular area. This spine, about 15 mm long, was embedded for about half its length in the musculature and had the basal portion extending slightly through the bird's plumage. The spine was identified as coming from a cactus of the genus *Opuntia*, probably *O. phaeacantha*, or a member of the *O. littoralis* species complex (Philip C. Baker, pers. commun.). The bird showed no obvious signs of discomfort due to the spine and appeared to be in good health. Its weight, 15.0 grams, was similar to that of 35 others weighed between 25 April and 6 May (14.1 to 17.4 grams averaging 15.41 grams.). I suspect the spine became embedded in the swift during a low-level foraging flight of the type mentioned earlier, when the bird struck a cactus plant. The impact presumably tore the spine from the plant, leaving it embedded in the swift, and thereby giving graphic proof that low-level foraging is not without its dangers, even to so maneuverable a bird as a swift.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the San Bernardino County Department of Regional Parks and to the Nature Conservancy for permission to conduct bird-banding operations in Morongo Valley. Larry Sansone, Jay Sheppard, David and Richard Bradley, Rusty Scalf and Barbara Massey assisted in netting the swifts.

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## MALLARDS RESTING IN TREES

On 6 February 1971 we were observing waterfowl in the Dune Lakes region 20 miles southwest of San Luis Obispo, California. A group of Mallards *Anas platyrhynchos* was resting in some willows *Salix lasiolepis* growing on the banks of one of the lakes (this lake of approximately 55 acres was also surrounded by tules *Scirpus acutus*). Another group of Mallards was swimming, courting, and bathing in the water near the edge of the lake. After bathing, four males and two females ascended some of the willow branches projecting over the water. The birds used two movements to get from the water onto the branches. To get onto the lower branches (hanging less than six inches over the surface of the water) each bird swam toward the willows, extended its head and neck beyond the branch, placed one foot on it, and moved up and over the foot forcing the branch downward, while raising the other foot onto the branch. To reach higher branches (from six to twelve inches above the surface of the water) each bird elevated its wings slightly and jumped up, presumably by pushing in the water with its feet (the water was deep enough so that the birds could not stand on the bottom). In no instance did the birds fly onto the branches. The birds had difficulty getting onto the higher branches, and often fell back into the water. Most of the branches were quite small (less than one inch in diameter), and the birds actually curled their toes over the surface of the branches. Birds on the branches were observed sleeping (head into wing position) and preening. One of us (J.L.T.) has since been back to the lake and observed the same behavior on thirteen occasions. However, she has not seen Mallards perching in trees on any of the other lakes in the region even though the vegetational patterns are similar.

In June 1970, 1,000 Mallards were released into the area by a private hunting club. Some or all of the birds we observed could have been from this stock, and the possibility exists that the behavior of the introduced birds is different from the wild stock. We know of no reliable way to distinguish between wild Mallards and hatchery birds (see McKinney, 1969. The Behavior of Ducks. In: Behavior of Domestic Animals, Second Ed. E. S. E. Hafez ed.)

It is not unusual to see Mallards on land feeding, nesting, or preening. They nest in a variety of situations on the ground, in vegetation, on artificial nesting platforms, or even in trees (Bent, Life Histories of North American Wild Fowl I, Dover Publications, New York, 1962: 38; Cowardin, J., Wildl. Mgmt., 33: 840, 1969; Lebrecht, Ardea, 49: 126, 1961; Weidmann, Z. f., Tierpsych., 13: 256, 1956). However, nests in trees or artificial platforms require a large surface area. It is unusual to see Mallards utilizing small branches for resting places, and there are no reports in the literature of Mallards actually perching on small objects.—F. Russell Lockner, Department of Biology Sonoma State College, Rohnert Park, California 94928. Douglas D. Donaldson, Biological Sciences Department, California State Polytechnic College, San Luis Obispo, San Luis Obispo, California 93401 and Judith L. Tartaglia, Biological Sciences Department, California State Polytechnic College, San Luis Obispo, California 93401.

## FIRST RECORD FOR THE RUFF IN WASHINGTON STATE

On 4 September 1971 we discovered a Ruff, *Philomachus pugnax*, at Crockett's Lake, near the Keystone ferry landing on Whidbey Island, Washington. The bird was associating with a Dunlin *Erolia alpina* in fading breeding plumage. Both were part of a large mixed-species assemblage of shorebirds that were feeding on the mud flats that border this tidal lagoon. The Ruff remained at Crockett's Lake until at least 19 September, during which time it was studied carefully by many other observers, including Dennis R. Paulson, Edmund T. Stiles, and Terence R. Wahl. The following description is adapted from notes taken at the time of our initial observation.

Upper parts: head tan with pale patch at base of bill; neck tan; back slightly darker, feathers with dark centers; scapulars blackish with light edges; primaries dark. Under parts: under tail coverts and belly pure white; upper breast light brownish with a few dark marks laterally. In flight: faint pale wing-stripe on dark wings, strongest at angle of wing; white of under tail coverts continuous laterally with white at dorso-proximal part of tail region, leaving a thin black line down center; distal half of tail dark. Size: body bulk about that of a dowitcher (*Limnodromus* sp.); neck short and thick in relation to that of a yellowlegs (*Totanus* sp.). Bill: black, slightly longer than head, and very slightly drooped at tip. Legs: carrot-orange; in proportion to body size, shorter than those of a yellowlegs but longer than those of a dowitcher.

When first seen, the Ruff was posturing a few inches from the Dunlin, as follows: legs vertical; body slightly tilted downward anteriorly; neck moderately stretched and tilted downward, with bill tip nearly touching ground; bill angled slightly toward tail; scapulars erect. The Ruff then flew off and fed alone. After ten minutes it returned to the Dunlin, tilted its bill up in "greeting," and immediately assumed the motionless posture. It then fed with the Dunlin for five minutes, at which point the Dunlin darted at the Ruff and flew. Instantly the Ruff followed, and the birds landed and fed together. The scapulars of the Ruff remained erect. Finally, both birds flew and disappeared in a distant portion of the lagoon.

The peculiar rigid pose was similar to the solicitation posture which the male assumes before the female during courtship. It was probably an "autumnal aggressive display" which, according to E. A. Armstrong (Bird Display and Behavior, 1965), is frequent in the Ruff and probably stems from a recrudescence of the hypersexual state of spring. In the fall this state reaches a lower level and produces intimidatory rather than sexual display. We infer, from its behavior, that the bird was a male. Those people who observed the bird subsequently saw neither unusual posturing nor close association with any individual bird.

This appears to be the first record of the Ruff in Washington. Other reports for the west coast of North America are concentrated in two areas: coastal southern California, where the Ruff was first recorded in 1962 (McCaskie, Condor, 65:166-167, 1963; Audubon Field Notes, 17:358, 1963) and has been seen yearly since 1966 (Audubon Field Notes, 21:77 and 458, 1967; 22:90 and 478, 1968; 23:108 and 521, 1969; American Birds, 25:109, 1971); and islands in the Bering Sea, where it is very rare (Gabrielson and Lincoln, Birds of Alaska, 1959; Thompson and DeLong, Bird-Banding, 38:214-218, 1967; Sealy et. al. Condor, 73:322-336, 1971). In Canada it has not been recorded west of Saskatchewan (Godfrey, The Birds of Canada, 1966). There are two published records for northern California (McCaskie, loc.

## NOTES

*cit.*), the first in 1961, and apparently none for Oregon. The Washington record provides a link in a possible migration (or mismigration) route taken by individuals that breed in arctic Siberia and fly down the eastern rim of the Pacific Ocean. Laurence C. Binford, *California Academy of Sciences, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, California 94118*, and Michael Perrone, Jr., *Department of Zoology, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington 98105*.



## LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

Editors, California Birds

The list in *California Birds* (A Checklist of the Birds of California, Calif. Birds, 1:4-28, 1970) follows Mayer and Short (Publications of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, 9:66, 1970) in suggesting that Pygmy and Brown-headed Nuthatches may be the same species. While the data presented by Norris (Univ. Calif. Publ. Zool., 56:119-300, 1958) could be interpreted this way, the two have different call notes. Pygmies give a high peeping; Brown-heads have a nasal "ki-ih-hih" triple note. Among nuthatches, I have not found call notes to vary strongly except between species. The current status in the A.O.U. Check-list is that of separate species, and there should be more evidence before they are considered the same species.

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Editors, California Birds

I would like to make two comments, both of which derive from "A Checklist of the Birds of California" published in the first issue of *California Birds*. Firstly, Black Duck and Tufted Duck are as suspect as vagrants as the other waterfowl you excluded, except perhaps Red-breasted Goose and Spectacled Eider, but in particular Falcated and Baikal Teal. Sight records of Anhinga in California probably give it as good a place on the California list as the Cape Petrel and Black-headed Gull. Secondly, the following species have not yet been properly documented as occurring in California even though they are included in the checklist: Yellow-billed Loon, Black Duck, White-rumped Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, Thick-billed Kingbird, Great-crested Flycatcher, Least Flycatcher, Wood Thrush, Yellow-throated Warbler, Pine Warbler, Baird's Sparrow and Cassin's Sparrow. The photos of White-eyed Vireo in the Point Reyes Bird Observatory publications are barely acceptable — why not *Vireo pallens*? I am glad the list has been so much shortened in recent issues, and hope you will be able to publish the details of the above species in coming issues.

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